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Urbanism and North American Funerary Practices

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Abstract

Urbanism is a way of life for those who reside in a densely inhabited area with a heterogeneous human population. The diversity of cultures, worldviews and practices found in urban areas combine in a form of cultural mixing. The urban amalgamation of cultures raises the question of how urban dwellers process their dead. Indeed, does urbanism influence regional death rituals and funerary practices? Other elements such as urban zoning laws, funerary technology or land scarcity add further dimensions to the original question. In short, do urban funerary practices and death rituals differ precisely because they are urban?

My research examines how urbanism affects the rituals and ceremonies that surround death in a North American urban setting, and specifically in Portland, OR. I further contrast the funerary practices in urban settings to those in rural ones, and analyze the influences or pressures urbanization poses on funeral practices. My research explores emerging trends in funeral practices and sheds important light on the changing rituals and symbols that surround death. The conclusions cover the upcoming issue of space scarcity in cemeteries and the new funerary applications of existing technology. Investigating interment practices in an urban setting reveals how an increasingly urban society interacts with death.

Introduction

In the cemeteries of New Orleans, most of the city and the surrounding area is below sea level. Both historical and contemporary citizens have built their tombs and cemeteries above ground to prevent a later reappearance of deceased family members during annual floods. Placing tombs above ground distinctly changes how people respond to death (Keister 1999). Witnessing these memorial monuments myself raised questions of how residents interact with tangible, daily reminders of death. Neither having the time nor the means to pursue that line of questioning in New Orleans, I limited the McNair project to Portland, OR. While the regional and historical context is vastly different, the research does explain funerary service patterns.

In short, I decided to examine how the environment of Portland (and by extension, other urban communities) influenced its citizens interaction with death. As my studies and research evolved, I found myself questioning the difference between urban and rural contemporary funeral

practices in Oregon, the Northwest, the West Coast, and the United States. For the purposes of this paper, I limited my quantative data to Oregon and used the results to infer information about large scale trends in the U.S.

With a background in anthropology, it makes sense for me to draw upon its literature to support my thesis. One such source is James Deetz. James Deetz is the godfather of funerary anthropology. His work on mortuary seriation is considered canon in the field of historical archaeology, and demonstrates how change over time is manifested in human funerary artifacts. Operating on Francis Ford's pioneering work on seriation, Deetz's work *In Small Things Forgotten* demonstrates how the change of gravestone markers coincided with the change of religious beliefs in Anglo-Americans in New England. The orthodox Puritan church, the earliest period discussed, used the harsh symbolism of a death's-head and stentorian epitaphs. In contrast, the succeeding period that signified the religious era called The Great Awakening saw a rise of cherubs and poetic statements about the soul on gravestones. Finally, the increasing secularization that rose during the post-Awakening era manifested in urn-and-willow grave markers, which contained simple memorials of the deceased individuals (Deetz 1996). Deetz concludes that human funerary artifacts and practices mirror the changing human worldview.

To understand the purpose of my research, I must define death as a sociological phenomenon. It might seem obvious, but it is crucial to realize the underlying ramifications of death. Death is not merely the absence of a deceased individual, but rather a disruption in the community structure (Kubler-Ross 1969). To process the loss of an individual, humans create and enact rituals that re-integrate the community after the disruption (Turner 1971). Over the last 150 years the traditional funeral, complete with a cemetery plot and burial within a grave, has been a North American ritual to assuage the emotionally painful interruption of death and reform the social

structure (Habenstein and Lamers 2001). My research suggests that in contemporary urban settings, as the physical and social structure of human settlements change, so do funerary rituals.

Risks and Benefits

My research focused on the impact of urbanism on death rituals and funerary practices. The subject naturally lent itself to reducing any personal or professional risks for the participants. I did not be interview individuals currently going through the grief process but rather licensed professional funeral directors who are very comfortable within their fields. My target audience is literate, with some collegiate training. Since the interviewees were professionals, the emotional or psychological risk was minimal. Nor did any of the information I collected pose a risk to the interviewees or their profession. The topic is not controversial, and I felt safe in providing a letter of intent that explained my research along with my contact information.

My research will provide indirect benefits for the interview participants by providing an in-depth review of how urbanism affects funerary practices and death rituals. If urbanism is affecting death rituals, we need to know in what way – adversely, beneficially, or perhaps neutrally. If funeral practices are evolving because of their urban or rural status, the conclusions derived from the research could assist funeral directors in evaluating what funeral services they provide. With this information, funeral directors can better serve the general populace through the grief process. The research also sheds light on expected future trends. Further research could precisely name the emotional/psychological impact of death in an urban setting.

Social Framework

The impact of urbanization upon funeral rituals cannot be overemphasized. Urbanism is more than a sum of many people in one location, but rather a combination of factors that produces a distinct phenomenon (Gmelch and Zenner 2001). My research is based on urban anthropological literature and is framed most notably on the work of Louis Wirth. Using urbanism as a research

framework has the benefit of including additional perspectives to create a cross-discipline perspective. In his seminal essay "Urbanism as a Way of Life," Wirth presents a detailed picture of what urban life consists of and how the city influences its residents. Wirth proposes that density, a large population, and diversity (or heterogeneity) are components of urbanism (Gmelch and Zenner 2001). A further examination of these three elements can elucidate why urbanism is important for understanding contemporary funerary practices.

Louis Wirth's first requirement for urbanism was size of population. Large amounts of people in one location meant there were more variations of cultures and religions present (Gmelch and Zenner 2001). By reason of sheer numbers, more racial and ethnic diversity is present in urban areas (Fulton 1967). Furthermore, Wirth argues that because there are so many urban individuals (contrary to those residing in a rural settlement), one person cannot know everyone. The sheer number of people present in urban settlements prevents deep interpersonal investment and results in what Wirth deemed as "superficial" relationships (Gmelch and Zenner 2001).

The resulting lack of closeness in urban areas creates a social distance. For Wirth, the social distance is exacerbated by impersonal communication modes. According to Wirth, the society in urban areas uses impersonal mediums to connect with the populace: television, newspapers, Internet. While these forms of communication are making a form of connection between parties, they retain a social and physical distance between human beings (Gmelch and Zenner 2001). One final aspect of the urban experience is the lack of vocational interdependence. People no longer have to rely on one another for their livelihood, as they did in rural historical times. Wirth concluded that less interdependence results in less personal investment in relationships and increases social distances yet again. Wirth feels that social distance is a characteristic of urbanism, created by an inability to be vocationally and personally interdependent upon one another (Gmelch and Zenner 2001).

Density is another crucial element of urbanism. When the population increases, but the area held remains the same, there exists a juxtaposition of many different cultures and practices in a small space (Fulton 1967). Wirth maintains that the resulting situation leads to an attitude of relativistic tolerance for heterogeneous neighbors and initiates or reinforces the trend toward secularization (Gmelch and Zenner 2001). Another byproduct of density in the urban equation is specialization. When many people occupy the same area, not all can do the same function or job. Indeed, many doing the same job would be redundant; therefore, people specialize their goods and services. Both of the trends have important ramifications for funerary practices in urban settings.

Heterogeneity is the final component in Louis Wirth's essay. The sheer numbers found in urban areas guarantee a larger presence of diversity. Different types of families or individuals are present in an urban area: childless adults, small nuclear families removed from their extended relatives, etc. The different cultures and religious and/or ethnic groups present add a feeling of social distance, while high levels of mobility lend a feeling of transience and reinforce the social distance inherent in urban settlements (Gmelch and Zenner 2001). Wirth, and subsequent scholars who have operated off his theoretical framework, believed that urbanism was a sociological phenomenon and not a mere sum of size, density and heterogeneity. Therefore, examining funeral practices influenced by the urban experience is a legitimate inquiry that expands on the U.S. worldview.

Literature Review

A qualitative element of my research is a relevant literature review. Composed of many disciplines such as urban anthropology, psychology of death, and U.S. funerary history, the literature review served as a foundation to base my research upon and to pursue the right questions. The cross-paradigm approach – a common tool in anthropology – provided a unique viewpoint that led to my conclusions.

During the mid-nineteenth century, interactions with death were quite different from contemporary practices. Then, people died at home and family members witnessed the biological effects upon the corpse of the deceased (Canine 1996). Preparing the body usually fell to the family, and when someone did die, everybody knew about it. Death in the mid-1800s was a stark reality (Canine 1996). However, a sociological trend occurred that had long-term effects for the funeral industry: the rise of Romanticism. The Romantic Era was a reactionary swing away from the logic and rationality associated with the Enlightenment, the previous sociological era. Instead of logic and science, Romanticism espoused emotion and sentiment. For funeral customs, Romanticism moved away from the stark reality of death, and found ways to beautify death and add sentimental meaning (Irion 1966). The Romantic Era saw elaborate decorative urns, coffins, mourning jewelry and other trends. Death became a transcendent experience rather than an earthy occurrence. In short, Romanticism created new perceptions about death (Kastenbaum 2000).

The subsequent Industrial Revolution provided the technology and the production means for standardizing the funeral regalia. Furthermore, the introduction of the funeral "experts" who came to prepare the corpse for the final transition and allowed families to grieve unhindered created even more distance between survivors and the reality of death. From then, survivors felt an ephemeral sense of loss rather than the concrete knowledge of the deceased's absence (Kastenbaum 2000).

Today, the trend continues. People die in hospitals, with impersonal technology measuring life left. Death diagnosis and prevention is removed from humans and left for impersonal machinery and experts to decide. My interviewee for Mt. Scott states that people are taking a more active role in funerary choices these days, but we still have a legacy of death denial, which was born in the Romantic Era and specifically in the United States (Hanson 2007). Death denial manifests in

ways like euphemistic language – such as "passing on" or "going to a better place" – relegating funerary tasks to the funeral director (Canine 1996; Laderman 2003).

Examining the North American funerary lineage naturally leads to the question "What next?" The combination of qualitative and quantative data has yielded information about intriguing trends in urbanism and funerary practices. The interview results show several influences unique to the urban experience. One, urban settlements, because of their large and heterogeneous cultural mixture, have different funerary needs. Two, space scarcity is already a problem in crowded places like Europe. It will become an increasing problem for the U.S. as our population density increases. Three, cremation increases because of the high levels of secularization in urban areas. And finally, new applications of existing technology affect the U.S. contemporary funeral practices.

Methodology

My research site is the Portland metropolitan area, and specifically contemporary funeral homes and crematoriums. The Oregon Historical Society and the Oregon Mortuary and Funerary Board have been invaluable venues of information for cemetery statistics. My methods consisted primarily of personal interviews and relevant literature reviews, which have provided insight into the historical and present patterns of funerary service in Oregon. I further attempted to conclude whether alternative funerary practices (i.e., cremation, green burials) are associated with urban centers.

Quantative Research

My quantative component for my research consisted examining all the settlements in Oregon and then assigning them into an urban or rural designation. After the initial assessment, I looked for any significant spatial patterns in funeral services: what funerary services were occurring where? On an aside, I realize that a binary dichotomy of rural-urban is simplistic and potentially inaccurate. But given the short time allowed for research and the preliminary status of this project, I

felt a basic dichotomy would illuminate or expose any spatially significant patterns. Further research could expand and refine the original findings on a later and more detailed project. Because the research was a preliminary inquiry of funeral practice patterns, I limited my quantative data to Oregon funerary services. My goal was to obtain a microcosm of regional funerary patterns that could potentially be extrapolated into further insights on a national scale. Of course, in my future research I will have to examine the political, ethnic and cultural context of Oregon for other sociological factors that could explain the patterns. In short, the regional context might be responsible for some of the findings rather than the rural-urban dichotomy.

My quantative data is from the 2005 Directory of the Oregon Funerary and Mortuary Board. The Directory is a complete list of operating and historical cemeteries, funeral homes and crematoriums. I assessed the census data on the cities that contained a funeral service: funeral home, cemetery, mausoleum and/or a crematorium. I noted any connections between the type of human settlement (urban vs. rural) and the type of funerary option available in that town. I relied on the Oregon state census information from 2005. In determining whether a settlement was urban or rural, I followed the Oregon Census definition: any human settlement with over 2500 residents is considered urban. After attaining a list of funerary businesses in the state of Oregon and classifying them as urban or rural, I determined what percentage of each type of funerary service corresponded with what type of human settlement.

Quantative Findings

My quantative findings demonstrated a spatially important pattern. Oregon has 239 settlements. Ninety of the 239 Oregon settlements had funeral homes. Sixteen of those homes are considered rural by the Oregon Census. Funeral homes are found everywhere on the rural-urban spectrum. But of the thirty-six towns that had crematoriums, all of these settlements are urban. If the crematoriums were equally distributed and followed no significant trend, one would expect that

at least a few crematoriums would reside in rural areas. However, all crematoriums in Oregon are located in urban areas, suggesting that the demand for funerary services is influenced by environment, possibly on a rural-urban spectrum.

Additional information showed that diversity in the rural towns was low, with a percentage of over ninety percent for all rural settlements for Caucasians, with the exception of two towns: Vale and Estacada. Vale has a white demographic of 82% and Estacada a white demographic of 85%. Both towns have a larger Hispanic-American population, and this accounts for the difference. Any ethnic information may prove vital at a later date in determining whether the rural-urban status or other sociological factors play a role in selecting funerary services.

Qualitative Research

My methodology for researching contemporary funeral services had both a qualitative and a quantative component. The qualitative data consisted of interviews from funeral directors about the diversity of services available in Oregon. To this end, I interviewed funeral directors from River View Cemetery Funeral Home, Zeller Chapel of the Roses, and Mount Scott Funeral Home. I selected subjects with expertise in the topic who were receptive to participating in the interview process. I contacted potential interviewees by telephone and/or e-mail, and briefly introduced myself and my research. If they wished to participate, I arranged a date to conduct the interview in person, at their convenience, so as not to interfere with their job. I performed semi-structured conversational interviews based on the list of questions approved by the Human Subjects Review Committee.

Qualitative Findings

My qualitative findings show three trends: one, regional differences influence what choices are available to the urban and rural residents. Two, alternative funeral options are more accessible in

the urban settlement. Three, a higher percentage of urbanites choose alternative funeral options than their rural counterparts.

Regional differences influence the consumption of funeral options greatly. Demographic trends particularly reflect consumer choices, educational requirements for funeral service and gender differences in the funerary business. My interview responses indicate that the United States follows regional trends in choosing funerary options. The unanimous consensus from my interviewees concluded that the East Coast is more conservative, choosing more traditional rituals like visitation (with embalming) and burial (Westin, Marteeny, Hanson 2007). Only in the Northeast (mainly in New England) and Florida are alternative funeral customs more common. In the Deep South of the United States, burials are the norm and more residents purchase pre-need packages to pay for their funeral costs (Westin, Marteeny, and Hanson 2007). The Midwest follows the trend of the East Coast; indeed, one funeral director stated that cremation was currently making an introduction in the Midwest (Marteeny 2007).

On the West Coast the regional trends change dramatically. Over sixty percent of residents on the West Coast opt for cremation, and more commonly choose alternative funerary options as opposed to traditional burials (Westin, Marteeny, Hanson 2007). When I inquired about the pronounced difference, funeral directors either mentioned more education or cited personal preferences (Westin, Marteeny 2007). However, in Gary Laderman's *Rest in Peace: A Cultural History of Death and the Funeral Home in Twentieth-Century America*, cremation statistics show that people who choose cremation are wealthier, have higher levels of education and progressive politics (2003). These same people support doctor-assisted suicide, have a variety of religious backgrounds, and are concerned about environmental sustainability (Laderman 2003). Laderman's statistics, particularly the progressive politics and concerns about sustainability, seem quite congruent with my findings about cremation prevalence on the West Coast.

Another trend that influences funerary choices on a regional scale are the education and licensing requirements. Each state sets their own training requirements for licensing as a funeral director or service technician (Marteeny 2007). There are no federally recognized minimum benchmarks for funeral service education. As a result, each state selects their own criteria. Thus, the subsequent pool of funeral directors differs vastly in terms of education and experience across the United States. For example, the state of Oregon requires a two year associate's degree and apprenticeship for the completion of funeral director training. In Ohio, a funeral director is required to have a Bachelor in funeral service education. Whereas in California, funeral director training consists of a year long apprenticeship; Colorado's requirements are even less stringent and mostly involve registering with the state to pay the licensing fees (Marteeny 2007).

The nationwide array of different educational benchmarks creates a pool of unevenly trained professionals who subsequently service the populace with uneven expertise. The vast educational differences yield a varied service that consumers, depending on the region they live in and the corresponding requirements for funeral service education, might not benefit from or receive the best care possible (Marteeny 2007). Indeed, the vastly disparate requirements could reflect the motivation of funeral directors. In states where education requirements are more strenuous, the professionals who achieve the established standards show a strong commitment to serve the population through the funeral process. The states that have less severe requirements will have a larger group of individuals whose motivations are more diverse: profit, not knowing what else to do, a mere job to pay the bills – overall, less educational requirements could equal less commitment (Marteeny 2007). In conclusion, the higher standards do not imply that they are the right standards, but those who complete the work are demonstrating stronger commitment to the field of funeral service.

Another demographic trend is women in the funeral service industry. Traditionally and historically, men have dominated the funeral service scene as directors and technicians. Only occasionally would a woman be seen in the funeral home, but more often than not she was married to the male funeral director (Mayer 1996). In the contemporary funeral industry, the East Coast still has a majority of male funeral directors. The same trend is present in the Deep South and the Midwest. On the West Coast, however, more women are funeral directors and undertake leadership roles in the funeral business (Westin 2007). Men are still the gender most heavily represented, but the number of females active in the industry rises every year. The shifting trend of women joining this industry coincided with the women's liberation in the 1970s (Laderman 2003). There are no studies that I can find about the effects of women funeral directors on the populace or why they are almost exclusively joining the industry on the West Coast. I can only speculate that the same elements that made cremation popular on the West Coast (wealth, high levels of education, and progressive politics) also ensures the increasing enrollment of female funeral directors on the West Coast.

Further Discussion

Examining national demographic trends sets up a foundation to examine what residents have available to them when they experience death. With the national trends established, research can be undertaken to examine the more localized differences within a region. I chose to examine differences between urban and rural funerary practices in the state of Oregon. From there, I can ask further questions about how these differences, if any are present, affect the grieving process and funerary choices of the consumer. Aside from the nationwide demographic trends, my research demonstrates two trends. These trends reflect the differences between rural and urban funeral customs. Namely, that different funeral options are available in urban settlements; higher percentages of urbanites go for funerary alternatives; and higher percentages of non-traditional

deaths in cities (like AIDS, homicide, suicide) and require different funeral needs (Canine 1996; Westin, Marteeny, Hanson 2007). Furthermore, more corporately owned funeral homes are present in urban areas and consequently affect funeral service (Marteeny 2007).

Because of the large number of people in small quarters and from diverse origins, urban dwellers are exposed to many different practices, and eventually attain a tolerance or an endorsement for those practices (Gmelch and Zenner 2001). As a result, more options are socially acceptable. A traditional funeral, like those common to the East Coast, Deep South and Midwest, includes a period of visitation (where mourners visit the dead and ascertain the reality of death), a funeral eulogy, and a procession to the grave plot located in the cemetery to inter the dead (Mayer 1996). My interviewees stated that these traditional funerals are less prevalent in urban areas in Oregon (Marteeny 2007).

Urban dwellers also have different funeral needs than their rural counterparts. Urban populations have a higher percentage of ethnically diverse residents: Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, the list goes on. Rural areas in Oregon predominantly identify as white (over 90% in the majority of rural settlements). The corollary of that fact is that Caucasians in the United States are generally Protestant. Therefore, rural funeral needs are homogeneous and the funerary options are less diverse. However, urban residents from different backgrounds have different funeral needs. For example, the Islam faith decrees the necessity of the body touching the soil when buried. In the United States, federal law states that the body must be enclosed in a box for public health reasons. Obviously, a conflict existed here: how does a Muslim obey the dictates of faith but be in accordance with U.S. law? One local cemetery in Portland resolved this problem by placing the body in the casket but removed the bottom slats of the coffin upon burial so that the body would touch the soil yet be enclosed by U.S. standards. Compromises like this example are subject to the decision and discretion of the funeral home involved (Westin, Marteeny, Hanson 2007). My

interviewees stated that many funeral homes in Portland would accommodate different funeral needs but the majority requested them in urban areas because a higher number of diverse individuals reside in urban settlements. In Portland, Lincoln Memorial Park and Funeral Home has a section for Buddhist burials; likewise, Finley-Sunset Hills Mortuary accommodates Muslim patrons (Marteeny 2007).

Another type of funeral needs stem from the type of death the decease experienced, and the subsequent grieving needs of the family and friends. In urban areas, residents experience higher rates of homicide, suicide, and AIDS. All of these types of death carry a social stigma and potentially complicate the grieving process for those remaining (Canine 1996). Some funeral homes provide brochures or refer survivors to support groups in the case of a specialized death. Whatever the response from the funeral home, it is clear that the higher rates of alternative types of death occur in urban areas because of the heterogeneous, large community found within and subsequently funeral directors in urban communities are presented with different funerary needs (Canine 1996).

Finally, urban funeral customs differ from rural ones because of the larger corporate funeral service presence (Westin, Marteeny, Hanson 2007). More rural settlements have a local privately owned outfit, whereas funeral corporations have been entrenched in urban areas for longer periods of time (Fulton 1967). According to my interviewee responses, the difference between corporate and private ownership is as follows: corporate funeral homes have to accommodate shareholders. Thus, they have considerably more paperwork for the deceased's family to fill out, and have to follow corporate rules by the book. As a result, corporate funeral homes are a business first and treat death (and the subsequent needs) as a transaction (Westin, Marteeny, Hanson 2007).

Furthermore, corporate funeral homes offer standardized, "cookie cutter" services to all their clients, regardless of needs. Corporate funeral homes are also often owned by a company located in a different region but only offer the standardized services in all areas (Marteeny 2007).

The problem with this scenario is that a corporately owned funeral in Portland may receive operating instructions from Texas; however, what's appropriate for Texas may not be effective in Oregon. Privately owned funeral homes have less paperwork for clients and operate to their own judgment and discretion. My interviewees all had positive statements to make about funeral homes, citing a personal touch that was lacking in corporate homes (Westin, Marteeny, Hanson 2007). Of the three interviewed, two are private, which is no surprise considering the statements made. The last one is corporately owned, but states it has operational freedom. Regardless of its corporate status, it agreed with my other interviewees.

Future Trends

I will move into the future trends of urban funerary customs. Two major trends will present themselves within the next twenty years. Indeed, some are already present in Portland. They are space, and the impact of new applications of existing or invented technology. Space for urban cemeteries will be an even bigger problem than it is now. On a local scale, the Willamette National cemetery, noted for housing the remains of Oregon veterans and their spouses, is running out of grave plots and expected to be full within ten years (Marteeny 2007). Abroad in England, the authorities of the densely crowded nation have authorized the re-use of graves, meaning that more than one individual will reside in one grave and will be stacked upon one another (Emling 2007). Cemeteries have gotten permission from surviving family members of the plots with related deceased to exhume the remains from grave plots in order to deepen the graves to house at least six more sets of remains, making a total of seven per plot (Emling 2007). One U.S. expert argues that "double-decker" grave plots would never occur in the U.S., but I disagree with that opinion. If double-decker graves are imported to the United States, it will arrive on the West Coast, as did the practice of green burials. Indeed, some graves in Willamette National are already double stacked, but in most of these cases the individuals involved were espoused before death. However, the space

issue won't truly affect urban areas until the population pressure has increased accordingly. When space becomes a premium, perhaps mausoleums will be an alternative.

New applications of existing or invented technology are a common theme in any field, and the funeral industry is no exception. Indeed, the generally recognized practice of cremation was once an innovative application of existing technology. New applications continue to originate in urban areas, as that is the common trend found in areas with many diverse individuals living in one area (Gmelch and Zenner 2001). Currently, several new trends exist: the eternal reef, green burials, the LifeGem, and the Internet viewing room. Green burials[1] are a funerary alternative found mostly on the West Coast or in New England (Marteeny 2007). On an aside, even cremation has an abundance of new processes to handle the ashes: scattering them in a wilderness or park setting[2]. The LifeGem is an extension of the tradition of mourning jewelry, creating diamonds from ashes[3]. Eternal reefs[4] are another funerary alternative, similar to green burials in purpose.

It should be noted that cremation technology is available to many in Oregon, rural and urban alike. For those willing to travel, so are green burials. However, many rural settlements process their dead the traditional funeral custom and have less exposure to concepts and options such as LifeGems or eternal reefs. Urban dwellers have more contact with alternative lifestyles,

[1] Green burials are a recent phenomenon and connected to the strong interests in sustainability. When families opt for green burials, the deceased is wrapped in a shroud or placed in a plain pine box, to aid in quick decomposition. No embalming or other chemical processes are allowed in green burials. The idea is to leave behind the least impact when one dies, and many funeral homes offer natural park-like settings for green burials. If a family chooses not to have a headstone, they are instead given the GPS coordinates to where the body is located (Laderman 2003).

[2] Scattering ashes is technically illegal in some areas, but many funeral homes often look the other way and advise the family to be discreet (Westin, Marteeny, Hanson 2007).

[3] Another trend in funeral technology is the LifeGem, a diamond made from the carbon of the deceased's ashes. A spendy investment, it is a new development in the tradition of mourning jewelry (Barnes 1991).

[4] Similar to green burials in its concern for sustainability, the eternal reef is concrete mixed with a deceased individual's ashes and molded into an artificial marine reef. People who choose that option cited the personal relief of giving something back to the earth (Barnes 1991).

cultures and ideas, and therefore a higher percentage of urbanites choose alternative funeral customs (Marteeny, Westin 2007).

The eternal reef, the LifeGem, and green burials have already been explained. However, the Internet viewing room, from a funeral home in Ithaca, NY, allows distant family members a chance to look upon their dead relative or perform visitation via Internet. These new applications of technology in the funeral industry vary in popularity with consumers, but the fact remains that the technology presents an ever-widening array of choices in how to interact with death in a contemporary setting. The research on future trends in funerary practices implies that choosing alternative mediums to process death assigns a unique (and largely unexplored) quality to urban funerary rituals. The new mediums offer a different way to interact with death, in ways that have never occurred before and the advent of these practices begs the question of the long-term effects on grievers. Like James Deetz's case study on mortuary seriation and the coinciding change in ontological worldview, the new mediums in which to process death may suggest a mirror to our contemporary lifestyles. What can be said with certainty is that the urban funerary practice is altered precisely because it is urban. The exact effect upon mourners is subject to further research.

Conclusions

In light of the evidence that different funeral options are available in urban areas, that higher percentages of the urban population choose alternative funerary practices, that urban dwellers have different funeral customs than rural residents, and that corporate funeral homes have a stronger presence in urban areas, it can be concluded that urban funerary practices are different from rural customs. But enumerating the differences is only part of this research. The second step is to find the meaning in differences, and establish how it affects the populations involved.

The conclusion is that funeral practices in urban areas are altered precisely because of the urban environment. A history of funeral customs and its subsequent shaping of the American

mourning process was provided earlier in the paper. The reactionary swing of the Romantic era that beautified and sanitized death (opposite of the focus on reality in the previous era of the Enlightenment), combined with the improved technology and increased reliance on funeral directors, creates an environment where death is a distant transaction to be handled by the experts: medical and funeral professionals (Canine 1996; Laderman 2003). The qualitative findings demonstrated demographic trends while the quantative findings suggested a spatially significant pattern in funerary service consumption. Further questions are raised at this point: Is the urban funerary experience positively or negatively impacted by urbanism? Is an urban funeral meeting the needs of mourners? Does the degree of urbanism determine consumer choices or does some other unaccounted for quality influence that decision? All the research creates new questions and continues the conversation of the U.S. Funeral service.

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